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AUTHOR Paisley, William
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ABSTRACT

Educational dissemination has contributed a number of innovative concepts and strategies to information science. Much-misunderstood ERIC, which combines research reports with policy documents and teaching materials, is one of the first and best examples of a field-oriented rather than discipline-oriented database. Building on ERIC, federal education agencies have experimented continuously with extension or outreach to the school districts. Three extension roles have emerged among agents or specialists who work with the schools; the concept of entitlement helps to explain differences among the roles. Education's strong equity premises have led to the concept of information equity as a prerequisite of equal access and equal treatment. To serve millions of educators in more than 15,000 school districts and 3,000 colleges and universities, innovative dissemination in education should now focus on the concepts of efficiency and economies of scale. (Author)

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GIVE US AN "E" FOR EDUCATIONAL DISSEMINATION

(ERIC, EXPERIMENTATION, EXTENSION, EQUITY)

William Paisley
Institute for Communication Research
Stanford University
Stanford CA 94305

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Abstract. Educational dissemination has contributed a number of innovative concepts and strategies to information science. Much-misunderstood ERIC, which combines research reports with policy documents and teaching materials, is one of the first and best examples of a field-oriented rather than discipline-oriented database. Building on ERIC, federal education agencies have experimented continuously with extension or outreach to the school districts. Three extension roles have emerged among agents or specialists who work with the schools; the concept of entitlement helps to explain differences among the roles. Education's strong equity premises have led to the concept of information equity as a prerequisite of equal access and equal treatment. To serve millions of educators in more than 15 thousand school districts and 3 thousand colleges and universities, innovative dissemination in education should now focus on the concepts of efficiency and economies of scale.

EDUCATIONAL DISSEMINATION

A Field Laboratory of Information Science

Attitude research and GI Joe. Diffusion research and the Iowa farmer. The future historian of science will be hard-pressed to explain how fields of applied social science grew up and flourished around the topics and problems that they are identified with. It is too facile to say that these were the available topics -- the problems of the time. Other topics and problems presented themselves and were studied, but they did not contribute to theory or empirical knowledge to the same extent. A better if somewhat evasive answer is that certain topics and problems have the "right" amount of pattern combined with complexity to provide useful data and interesting tests of hypotheses. Too much pattern leads to trite data; too much complexity leads to untestable theory.

The many fields that information scientists work with have different lessons to teach. The "pattern combined with complexity" in educational dissemination has led to unique systems, programs, and studies. Systems designers, managers, and researchers in educational dissemination are working in one of the most interesting field laboratories of information science.

ERIC: Eclectic Emulation

The first educational dissemination mandate, Title VII-B of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, obliged the Commissioner of Education to "disseminate information concerning new educational media, including the results of research and experimentation." The concept of ERIC (initially the Educational Research Information Center)

Figure 1. Three Modal Linking Roles in Relation to Selected Linking Functions.

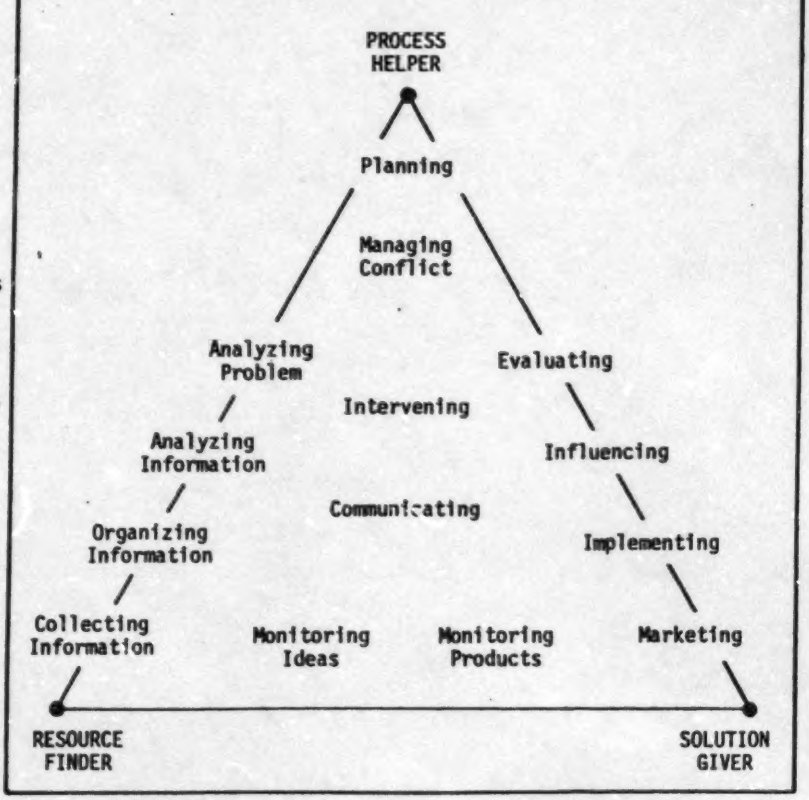

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Table 1. ERIC Database Coverage of Eight Educational Topics with Reference to Five Groups. Number of Postings to Coordinated Terms and Percentage Deviation from Expected Number of Postings (ERIC 1966 - 1978).

Groups / Topics	DISABLED 17 terms P=15,771	MIGRANTS 8 terms P=1,306	MINORITIES 15 terms P=14,763	RURAL 10 terms P=7,049	WOMEN 13 terms P=13,719	Total
ABILITY						
8 terms P=27,007	1,621 (+44%)	87 (-22%)	946 (-20%)	352 (-28%)	840 (-11%)	3,846 14% of P
LEARNING						
6 terms P=34,407	2,063 (+57%)	158 (+22%)	1,328 (-3%)	256 (-55%)	673 (-39%)	4,478 13% of P
INSTRUCTION						
6 terms P=64,818	2,026 (+22%)	218 (+33%)	2,231 (+29%)	636 (-12%)	555 (-60%)	5,666 9% of P
CURRICULUM						
5 terms P=35,677	1,025 (-11%)	166 (+47%)	1,603 (+34%)	676 (+36%)	452 (-53%)	3,922 11% of P
COUNSELING						
11 terms P=15,798	808 (0%)	46 (-42%)	622 (-26%)	336 (-4%)	950 (+40%)	2,762 17% of P
ATTITUDES						
7 terms P=36,650	1,367 (-43%)	155 (-34%)	2,471 (-1%)	981 (-6%)	3,207 (+60%)	8,181 22% of P
ADMINISTRATION						
6 terms P=16,330	649 (+16%)	49 (-11%)	468 (-20%)	345 (+42%)	404 (-14%)	1,915 12% of P
EMPLOYMENT						
8 terms P=14,210	695 (-44%)	134 (+9%)	1,059 (-19%)	875 (+61%)	1,513 (+44%)	4,276 30% of P
Total	10,254 65% of P	1,013 78% of P	10,728 73% of P	4,457 63% of P	8,594 63% of P	35,046

was born soon thereafter in planning grants to information scientists at Columbia University (1) and Western Reserve University (2). There was no satisfactory model of a field-oriented rather than discipline-oriented information system in the mid-1960s. Lee Burchinal, Tom Clemens, and other ERIC planners "patched together" ERIC's functions from what they regarded as exemplary systems in other agencies -- NASA, DOD, NBS, etc. (3).

Differences between field-oriented and discipline-oriented databases were not understood at first. The fact that the ERIC database was unrefereed offended documentalists, but criteria of scientific merit are hard to apply to typical ERIC documents such as state curriculum guides and locally developed teaching materials. A field-oriented database has not only "something for everybody" but also "something from everybody."

Extension Experiments

Studies conducted when ERIC was a few years' old (4) showed that ERIC products were not reaching school personnel. Teachers and principals were not disposed to searching an abstract journal like Research (later Resources) in Education or reading documents in microfiche.

After experimenting with a series of state-of-the-art syntheses (PREP -- Putting Research into Educational Practice) and glimpsing the limits of print dissemination, the Office of Education adapted the model of interpersonal "linkage" from the Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service. Beginning with seven agents in three states, the federally sponsored, state-run extension programs were reaching (in principle

Table 2. Distribution of Educational Information Programs, ERIC Collections, and Sample of Users of Educational Information, by Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

	RURAL/ SMALL TOWN	SMSA SMALLER THAN 200,000	SMSA 200,000 TO 500,000	SMSA 500,000 TO 1,000,000	SMSA LARGER THAN 1,000,000	Total
INFORMATION PROGRAMS	56 (11%)	36 (7%)	73 (14%)	61 (12%)	282 (56%)	508 (100%)
ERIC COLLECTIONS	110 (18%)	91 (15%)	112 (18%)	99 (16%)	210 (34%)	622 (100%)
USER SAMPLE	423 (17%)	285 (11%)	436 (18%)	352 (14%)	992 (40%)	2,488 (100%)
POPULATION IN MILLIONS	58.2 (27%)	11.2 (5%)	25.3 (12%)	30.0 (14%)	88.3 (41%)	213.0 (100%)

if not in practice) a majority of U.S. school districts by the end of the 1970s.

The first cadre of extension agents had a resource-finding role only. They received requests from school personnel and searched for ERIC or other print resources that would answer the requests. This narrowest level of "entitlement" to become involved in school problems was politically acceptable because it did not change the balance of initiative among federal, state, and local education agencies.

Another extension role, that of the process-helper, emerged in federal and state programs focusing on school improvement and equity. The typical process-helper is a technical assistance specialist; he or she works on assignment to the schools from a university or nonprofit research organization. The goals of the assistance are negotiable; the broader entitlement of this role is subject to the satisfaction of the school district.

The broadest level of entitlement in educational extension is found in change programs like the National Diffusion Network, whose developer/demonstrators are representatives of "validated practices" -- solutions in search of applications.

Figure 1, reproduced from (5), shows how "linking functions," as they have come to be called, relate to the three "linking roles."

Equity: Another View of Entitlement

The service philosophy of educational dissemination has become more proactive over time, and the question begins to be asked, "Who are the people left out?" An exploration of information equity in terms of the ERIC database and access points to educational information (6) showed patterns of disproportion and maldistribution. Table 1 shows contrasts, for example, in ERIC database postings that pertain to groups like women and the disabled. Whereas 66% of documents on the disabled deal with the topics of ability, learning, instruction, and curriculum, only 29% of documents on women deal with these topics. Conversely, 66% of documents on women deal with the topics of counseling, attitudes, and employment, but only 28% of documents on the disabled deal with these topics. Such analyses can focus attention on disproportions in a database, but of course the analyses cannot determine "correct" proportions.

Table 2, whose methodology is explained in (6), shows that a user's best access to information programs, relative to population, occurs in the largest cities. A user's best access to ERIC microfiche collections, relative to population, occurs in small cities where many state capitals and universities are located.

Efficiency and Economy of Scale

Extension is expensive; equity is expensive; many school districts still receive no dissemination services. How will educational dissemination meet rising expectations with falling dollars? Stay tuned for experiments with new service arrangements (7), human-machine tradeoffs, tertiary (special-purpose) databases (8), and ... who knows?

REFERENCES

Most of these reports are available only from ERIC. If you do not use ERIC, write to the author for citations. (1) LILLEY & TAUBER, ED 003144. (2) KENT et al., ED 003251. (3) TRESTER, D. ERIC: The First Fifteen Years. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1980. (4) CHORNESS et al., ED 026748. (5) BUTLER & PAISLEY, ED 159134. (6) PAISLEY et al., ED 172827. (7) PAISLEY et al., ED 171256. (8) BUTLER & BRANDHORST, this volume.